

**Nebraska Information Technology Commission
Community Technology Fund
Final Report – June 2009**

Applicant Name: University of Nebraska

Project Name: Developing Websites for Community Growth

Date: June 2009

Project Contacts:

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Please list the major objectives or activities contained in your grant application and give a brief update and percent completion for each one:

Course and Material Development—Initial Development is 100% completed.

An extensive list of topic areas to consider including in a community website along with examples was developed as well as work sheets for communities to complete. A website (www.websitesforgrowth.com) and Google Docs site have been created for the project. Materials will continue to be revised upon input from communities.

Train the Trainer Training—100% completed.

Over 25 participants attended one of four training sessions. Training was provided by Tim O'Brien, Connie Hancock, and Jenny Overhue.

The dates and locations of the training sessions are listed below:

- September 22 - Lancaster County Extension Office - 444 Cherrycreek Road, Suite A, Lincoln
- September 23—NPPD, Columbus. Note: The NPPD lab only has 1 PC and 6 laptops.
- September 29 - Panhandle Research and Extension Center - 4502 Ave. I, Scottsbluff
- September 30 - West Central Research and Extension Center - 461 W. University Drive, North Platte

Web Site Development Pilot—100% completed.

Course materials were piloted by Tim O'Brien in Ord and Connie Hancock in Oshkosh.

Awareness Sessions—Not held

As it became apparent that there was strong interest from communities, a decision was made to not hold awareness sessions.

Web Site Development Outreach—80% Completed

Twenty-one communities applied to participate in the program. The following eleven communities were selected to participate:

- Burwell
- Butler County
- Elwood
- Gering
- Grand Island
- Laurel
- Pender
- Scribner
- South Sioux City
- St. Paul
- Valentine

All communities have created a website content committee. Through the year, each community has created a sitemap, worked on creating content, and 5 have launched a new website.

Through an on-line evaluation, it was determined that the Websites for Growth project was helpful in establishing communication with community leaders who have a vested interest in the online presence. They have found that networking with local community leaders, exploring other websites, learning about new online tools through the webinars, and holding regular community meetings was most helpful.

Obstacles to accomplishing the project included time commitment involved, cost involved in creating an on-line presence and lack of understanding, lack of defined roles for committee members, fear of hurting current web developer and security issues.

The most important points of participating in the Websites for Growth project include:

- understanding how critical it is to have a on-line presence with appropriate content for the target audience to find
- having the commitment to focus on what a website should include
- greater understanding of the pro and cons of the current web site and how we can enhance
- greater awareness of what a web site can do for a community – many businesses have a greater appreciation and are looking into creating their own on-line presence
- provided necessary guidance to accomplish the goal of re-creating the current on-line presence

The long term impact is yet to be determined but community members and businesses are more aware of the importance of having an on-line presence. Some have incorporated a web analytic program to track users.

Suggestions for future Websites for Growth projects include:

- create webinars that are not so technical
- conduct hands-on workshops to build a greater awareness of the on-line tools available
- show us what is working – case studies or success stories

Accessibility Testing—0%

Accessibility testing will be done after communities have developed their websites.

Marketing Assistance—100%

We had originally planned on having two webinars which would provide additional information and assistance in marketing community websites. We have expanded the webinars to include a series of 8 webinars. The webinar schedule is listed below:

- **Introductory Webinar for Facilitators and Community Leaders**, Oct. 30, 2008
- **Consumer Research Webinar: What Attracts New Residents and Keeps Them**, Nov. 20, 2008
- **Webinar for Facilitators** , Nov. 19, 2008
- **Marketing, Web 2.0, and Web Enhancements Webinar #1—Google Docs/Sites**, Dec. 11, 2008
- **Marketing, Web 2.0, and Web Enhancements Webinar #2—Flickr and Blogs**, Jan. 8, 2009
- **Marketing, Web 2.0, and Web Enhancements Webinar #3, LinkedIn** - Feb. 12, 2009
- **Marketing, Web 2.0, and Web Enhancements Webinar #4, Podcasting** March 12, 2009
- **Marketing, Web 2.0, and Web Enhancements Webinar #5, SEO** April 9, 2009
- **Marketing, Web 2.0, and Web Enhancements Webinar #6, Employment**, May 14, 2009
- **Marketing, Web 2.0, and Web Enhancements Webinar #7, Web Analytics**, June 11, 2009

Community Website Critique and Recognition—0%

The website critique and recognition program will be held later this year with awards being presented during the Governor's Conference on Rural Development in November 2009.

Please document any impact the project has had on both the primary beneficiaries of the program and any secondary beneficiaries. If possible, include both quantitative and qualitative indicators. Qualitative data can include comments from participants.

The number one benefit of this project is getting the website stakeholders together to talk about what is most important, sharing the research, and having them analyze who their target audience is and what information they may be searching for.

Having monthly webinars on new online marketing tools has benefited the communities and gotten them to think about how they can reach a new audience or alumni in a much more 'fashionable' manner.

Comments from participants are below:

"This has been the best project to be involved with – I have learned to much about what type of information we should be hosting on our website. The webinars have been most useful to me to think differently about what additional tools we should utilize" quote from participant in Gering.

"I believe it has made the whole community aware of the need for a website. Many businesses are now looking into websites and what they can do to market their business. People tended to be unaware of the importance until they read all of our articles in the local newspaper talking about the grant and the progress of this project."

"Having department representatives spell out exactly what is needed and when it is needed of community members. It seems too generalized, most community members thought it would be: "this part [of the website] is no good, change this change that, etc. Instead it was "effective sites do this", "research has shown this" now go make your site better."

"The impact has been good. Although we want to take the website to the next level, we have experienced some really fun things because of our web presence. Three Scribner-Snyder students were banner carriers for Governor Heineman at the John C. Fremont Days Parade because of contact info on the website, a bus-load of UNL foreign exchange students ate at a local restaurant because of web exposure, multiple phone calls are fielded at the Economic Development Center due to website contact info. Many Dodge County Fair participants accessed fair schedules via our website."

"With the information provided, I have a better understanding of the pros and cons of our current website...great for citizens, not too great for Economic Growth. We intend to change that with out update in September."

"We knew the importance of the site to the community but this project helped us focus on getting something done."

"The best part of the process was learning through group discussion what items people found important to include on a recruitment site and learning through research what was available in our community."

"All kinds of people are checking out the website -- we have had over 4,000 hits already and we have not been up yet for a whole month. It appears that we are getting people talking about the progress of our little town."

Please indicate what you have learned from this project. What advice would you give to others undertaking a similar project? Is there anything that you would do differently?

As with any web project – getting commitment from the participating entities is the most critical component. Getting commitment from a core group of people up front is critical. Every community is at totally different levels and thought process with their website. Getting people to understand how important their online presence is, who their target audience is and what the purpose of their website is – is probably the hardest part of the project.

Comments from participants are listed below:

"A lot of the webinars were way over our heads and had little meaning. If you aren't very technical it's hard to understand."

"The webinars are great, but it would be nice to have atleast one hands on experience to learn short cuts, etc. One community workshop would be good to work through questions ."

"I could have used more hands on type education. I am familiar with most of the concepts, but could have really used more instruction on the actual 'usage' of the concepts. Thank you for selecting our community for this program. Although we have not yet accomplished what we would like to, we are storing the knowledge for future use! Thanks again!"

"I was expecting more assistance from this program than what we received (resources, guidelines, check lists, etc). Google accounts were set up, I thought, to allow for interaction, communication, and resource assistance between the community and the project coordinators. However, I could never find resources through that account and only received a couple of items at the onset of the program. There was no ongoing communication. The website was also of little help as the only 'resources' available were archived conference calls. Since I have no experience in developing a website, I was expecting the program to lead the way and guide me through the process more. The information we were provided may have helped us think of what to include, but I could've created that list myself just by looking at other community's sites. The facilitator assigned to my community was available when I had questions, and attended most meetings (there were some scheduling conflicts), but I thought the program itself would offer more help through this process."

- IV. **"Use of funds must be substantiated consistent with standard accounting procedures. Subsequent payments will not be made unless a current and complete accounting is provided for previous payments. This accounting should include receipts or invoices of all expenditures made with grant funds."**

Using the format provided on the following page, please provide an update of grant finances including Items, Budgeted Amounts, Amounts Expended, Amounts Encumbered, Amounts Remaining. Copies of receipts and invoices must be included.

Financial Information. Provide financial information using the format below. If you have no entries in a particular column or row, you may omit it. If you have several entries in a category, please itemize on a separate page.

	Grant Budgeted Amount	Grant Amount Expended	Grant Amount Encum- bered	Grant Amount Remaining	Cash Match Supplied	In-Kind Match Supplied	Other Funding Sources
Personnel (1)							
Contractual Services							
• Design							
• Programming and Testing							
• Project management, evaluation, and quality assurance							
• Other (2)							
Capital expenditures (3)							
• Hardware Acquisition							
• Software Acquisition							
• Network costs							
• Other							

Other Costs							
Telecommunications							
Supplies and materials							
Other operating (4)							
Travel		844.95					
TOTAL		844.95					

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